



Bridgewater Review

Volume 32 | Issue 2

Article 3

Nov-2013

Editor's Notebook

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Recommended Citation

Holman, Andrew C. (2013). Editor's Notebook. *Bridgewater Review*, 32(2), 2-3.
Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol32/iss2/3

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Editor's Notebook

Andrew C. Holman

This past May, *Bridgewater Review* associate editors Ellen Scheible and Brian Payne and I piled into a rental car for a six-hour drive to the once-leafy burgh of Binghamton, New York, for the annual three-day meeting of the University Research Magazines Association (URMA). We were on a mission to find, mingle among, and interrogate our peers. These are the people who edit and publish the magazines that many universities house, the ones that trumpet the fine scholarly work of their faculty members as well as the brick-and-mortar and curricular accomplishments being made on their respective campuses. There is a veritable sea of university publications out there, of several different genres—from literary journals to glossy alumni mags—and our curiosity about that world motivated us to look up and out. We convinced our advisor that we were most interested in tracking “best practices” in our field, but in truth, we were probably motivated more by finding out simply how we are doing. Where, in the universe of published smart talk, does *BR* fit? URMA would be our yardstick.

What makes *Bridgewater Review* uniquely positioned, however, is that there is no programmatic editorial intermediary between the voices of our scholars and teachers and the ears of our readers.

URMAnS are nice people. The 60 or so of them in attendance were universally welcoming to the three of us. They seemed to know each other very well, and for good reason. Almost all of them we met are career, salaried, public-relations professionals who share common backgrounds in journalism and the common interests and challenges of publishing university magazines. They are a close-knit bunch whose in-conference tweets have been only marginally surpassed by their listserv posts in the months since the conference ended. But perhaps most striking was their near-universal ability to produce stunningly beautiful work, as even a cursory leafing through the pages of UNC Chapel Hill's *Endeavors*, Indiana University's *Research & Creative Activity*, or Oregon State's *Terra* magazine would demonstrate.

There was a good deal for us to learn from the URMAnS. And we did. Presentations on goal-setting, the uses and misuses of graphics, fact checking, audience reckoning, branding and other subjects pushed us to think about things to which we, academics in History and English, would never have had exposure in our regular routine as teachers and scholars. There were some awkward moments, too. When we arrived with a full, large box containing copies of our latest issues to share, I felt like the guest at a small family cookout who brings enough potato salad to feed an army. When I queried one doctrinaire presenter about his propensity for disguising argument as narrative truth, his response was a bit tetchy, and his colleagues ominously silent. Awkward, too, were the moments in casual conversation when URMAnS forgot that Ellen, Brian and I were *faculty* members—at the end of the day, not really their kind. When asked what she believed her role to be with her

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university magazine, one URMAn told me: “I am a sort of bridge. I take the confusing and complicated ideas that professors produce and turn them into prose that people in the real world can understand.” She manages the talent.

In one sense, our little upstate New York sojourn was something of a failure. We didn’t find our peers beyond the BSU campus, at least not as we expected. And we came to conclude, I think, that *Bridgewater Review* is an uncommon beast. Like other universities’ research magazines,

BR is an avenue for the expression of our university’s intellectual life. That intellectual life comes in the form of research reports, viewpoint and opinion pieces, book and film reviews, and stories from the archive, the laboratory, the classroom and other places on and off campus.

Bridgewater Review is a dog’s breakfast. What makes it uniquely positioned, however, is that there is no programmatic editorial intermediary between the voices of our scholars and teachers and the ears of our readers. No spin. No bridge. No management. No interpretation is necessary. This is the

genius of a magazine that was founded by Mike Kryzanek more than thirty years ago and shaped by his editorial colleagues throughout those years: Barbara Apstein, Bill Levin, Don Johnson and Charlie Angell. It is a testament to their foresight and drive that it remains with us today, very much with the same purpose and spirit that it had in 1982. In another way, perhaps, Ellen, Brian and I did accomplish our mission. And we returned from URMA feeling that, though there are many things that we could do to improve our magazine’s presentation, we mustn’t do anything to alter its essential thrust.

It’s awfully cliché to say that you can’t appreciate home until you’ve gone away. But we do, because we did. And that gives us some confidence to continue to steer the ship on its well-established course. In this issue, *BR* serves up another big bowl of mixed hash—about psychological measurement, viruses, material poverty and progress, scholarly identities, gun ownership and more—a mélange of insights that come from us, from our own research, from our own pedagogical and scholarly lives, and in our own words.



Andy Holman